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AUTHOR Parsons, James B.
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ABSTRACT

The nature and possible future of heroes is examined in this document. The approach is theoretical to the extent that it explores the nature of heroes in the Western tradition from the Greeks through present-day personalities (including sports, entertainment, political, and literary personalities). The approach is practical to the extent that it synthesizes the literature and creates a typology suitable for use by social studies teachers at both the upper elementary and secondary levels. The main objectives of this paper are to historically explore the idea of heroes, show how types of heroic activity may have changed, and speculate about the possible future of heroes. The paper includes a typology useful in the study of both historical and contemporary figures. Six archetypes--the athlete/cowboy (Homeric), the endowed (tragic), the lover (erotic), the thinker, the comic (Shakespearean), and the rustic--are identified and examined through four social and cultural contexts (personality traits, personal values, the kind of actions engaged in, and view of the world). Individual examples of each archetype are included. (RSL)

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FULFILLING AN AMERICAN DREAM: A TYPOLOGY OF HEROES (SOME BEGINNING IDEAS)

BY

James B. Parsons

Associate Professor

Social Studies Education

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Introduction

Regardless of sex, race, or creed every child I have ever known has dreamed of heroic strength, act, or personality. Historically, North America clings to a past made important by the efficacious actions of citizens and looks to a future, regardless of circumstances, where the individual citizen continues to hold the power to shape and control events. What is the future of heroes in North America? What kind of powerful activities will our children have opportunity to undertake? The link between powerful (heroic) activity and the nature of the good citizen is an important consideration for a discussion of the future of democratic action.

This paper will focus on the nature and the possible future of "heroes". It will be theoretical to the extent that it will explore the nature of heroes in the Western tradition from the Greeks through present-day personalities (including sports, entertainment, political, and literary personalities). It will be practical to the extent that it

will synthesize the literature and create a typology suitable for use by social studies teachers at both the upper elementary and secondary levels.

My objectives for this paper are to historically explore the idea of hero, show how types of heroic activity may have changed, and speculate about the possible future of heroes. An end result of the paper will be the creation of a typology useful to study both historical and contemporary figures. Such study will focus on the political nature of North American life and the social and cultural context in which North Americans live. The study of heroes in the North American context can give a clearer picture of the cultural flavour of life in North America.

My Interest in Heroes

My interest in heroic activity goes back a long way. I remember, as a child of maybe eight or nine, walking to school in the winter. I prided myself on my ability to throw snowballs, and I would imagine that some older, mean boys would bother or in some way harrass a weaker person, maybe a little kid or a girl. (I had no idea at the time that I was a young sexist.) In my mind, I would come upon this situation and, because of my unfailing accuracy with throwing snowballs, I would drive off those "attackers". I even had a name for myself that is now too silly to mention. But, at this time in my life, I was quite serious about it.

I was reinforced in my heroic dreams by both literature I was reading at the time (the Hardy Boys, Mel Martin, DC Comic Books, my

Grandfather's old collection of Edgar Rice Burrough's books, etc.). I watched William Tell, Robin Hood, and The Lone Ranger on television. Even Lassie did heroic deeds every Sunday night at 7 p.m. In school I learned about heroes who later became Presidents, leaders, and important people in United States history. In short, 1955 in Northwestern Pennsylvania was a perfect time to dream of being a hero. Ike was president, football players did not strike, progress was still General Electric's most important product, soon there would be primates in Space, Jack Webb used the impassioned skill of a scientist to catch the crook before the hammer fell, and neither David or Ricky Nelson had heard about drugs. Free enterprise was booming and both individual and corporate activity seemed particularly efficacious.

In 1980, serendipity linked my reading of a book by Jan Kott The Eating of the Gods with my son's (age 3) interest in Spiderman and Superman. After completing a university session in the Spring, I began to stay home with our children more often. My son's actions and his insistence upon wearing a homemade Superman outfit reminded me of my childhood. I began to read more and to think more about heroic action - this time as an educator instead of merely a dreamer - and I began to talk with other people about their own memories. Although certainly not obsessed, I became more thoughtful about the implications of heroic thought to what it means to be a good citizen in a democracy, particularly a North American democracy. I discovered one interesting thing. In my initial discussions with a variety of people, males almost always had thoughts similar to my thoughts about being a hero while

females generally told me they had not had those kinds of thoughts. I don't know, however, quite what to make of this difference.

The Democratic Significance of Heroes

North America, particularly the United States, has seemed to place a high value on activity deemed as heroic. Early colonists, settlers, and even some indiginous native Americans are legendary for their heroic actions. Early explorers are remembered as much for their cleverness and sense of adventure than their seeking of economic gain. Presidents and other leaders were heroes; Paul Revere and Betsy Ross are immortalized for their actions. Furthermore, traitors died unloved, scorned, or forgotten. In short, North American democracy has placed an extremely high value on individual citizens. To understand the history of America, one cannot help but study the history of the individual. And, probably more than anywhere else in the world, North American democracy promises the opportunity for any citizen to use the power of his or her individual action to gain status, wealth, and/or prestige . . . the good things in life.

The social studies, throughout most of North America, justifies its position as an important school subject because of its attention to the development of citizenship in a democracy. Since the link to democratic action in North America is connected, often, to heroic, efficacious action, a look at the nature of heroes both past and present in the Western tradition can give some insight into the nature of American life, the American dream, and my own dream as a youngster growing up in Pennsylvania in the 1950s.

Kinds of Heroes

As I have mentioned before, my interest in heroes over the past three years or so connected my son's play activities with a book on Greek tragedy. This book (The Eating of the Gods) dealt most specifically with the Homeric hero, but it did lead me to other sources that described other types or conceptions of heroic action. These types of heroes represent my synthesis of such books and my own thoughts. There are six basic types of heroes in my category system; the first being the Homeric hero.

The Homeric Hero (the Cowboy or Sports Star)

This type of hero is amazingly attractive because of his talent - he is gifted with that special something that others simply do not possess. In the legends and narratives of the Old West, the gunfighter or card player with the fastest draw, the steeliest nerves, or the coolest disposition under pressure is an example of this kind of hero. Recently, the battlefield, the sagebrush blown street, and the smoke-filled room have given way to the football field, the ice arena, the baseball diamond, etc. The hero of Homer has changed to the hero of sport. Where else but in sports or entertainment is the world of the homeric hero replicated so closely?

The homeric hero is known by his exceptional deeds and is given status by those who would like to be able to complete such deeds, but cannot. For example, can anyone handle the puck like Wayne Gretzky, sing like Frank Sinatra, stay cool under pressure like Reggie Jackson, or dominate a basketball game like Kareem?

Since the homeric hero (or the sports star) is so abnormal, his code of honor or rules of existence are personal. Superman, for example, must make his own laws since he can not be held by the rules that hold regular man. This type of hero lives a life of high emotion and lives most fully when he matches against another hero or anti-hero (ie., Reggie Jackson lives best when facing Steve Carlton in game 7 of the World Series; Wayne Gretzky when facing the Russians; Ali vs. Fraser; etc.).

Good and bad luck are especially important and the lucky shirt, hat, ring, etc. play an important part. The world of homeric hero is so filled with conflict and contest that these come to be the normal condition of life. Existence is lonely and the hero remains separated from any family or friends (eg., Joe Namath never marries). These heroes' lives seem to never transcend the immediate moment; and, because the immediate moment is subject to time, the world of this hero is tragic - through no fault of his own except that he can not escape the nature of life and existence. For example, the beauty queen ages, O.J. Simpson loses a step, Ali gets flabby, Sinatra's voice leaves him, Arnie gets the yips.

The Rich, Endowed (Tragic) Hero

Examples of the endowed, tragic hero include J.F.K., John Belushi, Marilyn Monoe, and Richard Nixon. This classic type of hero is noted for his/her pedigree, glory, or good furtune. At the beginning of this person's life (or early in the person's life) things seem to be going extremely well. Either the hero is born to good fortune (as in the case

of the Kennedys) or is born with special potential for fortune (as in the case of the comic "genious" of John Belushi and Freddie Prinz); however, the life of this hero seems to be plunged into a kind of suffering (i.e., Richard Nixon's Checkers era). Sometimes, the suffering makes the hero stronger. At other times, the suffering contributes to the eventual downfall of the tragic hero.

This hero is called, classically, the tragic hero because the hero generally falls (loses status, position, or even his life). Usually, the hero falls because of an extreme self-confidence or pride which makes him feel that he is above the law (i.e., the Gingerbread Man or Richard Nixon). And, because the hero has such a high visibility, his fall is witnessed by a large number of people - the embarrassment is complete.

In Greek tragedy, the hero is put into a situation where he must do wrong because of the sin of hubris (overwhelming self-confidence). Only a person with exceptional fortune can be tempted in this way. The mistake the hero makes is his refusal to accept his limitations and weaknesses. This person, although he must be reconciled by the law, often does not change from within - believing himself to be the scapegoat rather than the cause of his own downfall (i.e., Douglas MacArthur, Richard Nixon, Idi Amin, potentially Richard Prior and Pierre Trudeau).

The Erotic Hero (the lover - collector)

After the Dark Ages, literature about sex and sexual passion became a literary topic. And, in this literature (according to W.H. Auden), two kinds of love were discussed: (1) a category called "the world lost for

love"; and (2) a category called "the seducer". Briefly, the first category describes a situation where lovers are drawn to each other although they are caught in an inescapable web of social, legal, or moral obligation. Their relationship is tragic because if it develops it will ruin both members. An example of this type of relation is the love of Sir Lancelot and Lady Guineviere in Camelot; or Marlon Brando in the movie Sianara.

I have ignored this first category in order to develop the second - which is more prominent in North American society. This second category is the category of the seducer.

Like pornography, seduction is not about sex but rather about math. The seducer is a collector, be it money (Scrooge), corporate power (George Steinbrenner), women (Don Juan), or material possessions (the Gabor sisters) or military power (the U.S. or Soviet Union). There is no utility in the "object" collected, and the seduction is trivial; what counts is the list. If the "object" is a lover, or a sports franchise, or a dollar, the seducer (collector) will not stop until he has collected every "object" that he can.

Today's version of this hero tends to gloss over the fact that this kind of person is always intensely unhappy, has no personal relationship, and is frustrated because his goal really can never be reached. In an attempt to collect and a focus on the "score", every action becomes a means to an asocial, impossible end. And, unless there is a miraculous change (as in Dicken's A Christmas Carol) the hero is destined to remain alone, living and dying in loneliness (i.e., Howard

Hughes). One would anticipate this kind of a hero in an increasingly more materialistic and economic world.

The Contemplative (The Thinker)

The contemplative/thinker tends to live in an attitudinal rather than an active world and probably can come from any area of life. For example, Clint Eastwood, Ghandi, and Timothy Leary might all be contemplative, although their lifestyles are very different. This hero seems to work for the ultimate happiness (of the soul) that comes from discovering the true, rather than the false, good. Like Casteneda's Don Juan, the goal is to escape the temporal, physical world or to gain a new insight into that world. The contemplative must first save himself from the entrapments of the world before he can teach society to attain the same freedom. This hero has an incredibly optimistic world view, often believing that people can both escape the world and, once that is done, can live in universal justice and peace.

Although contemplatives probably believe differently, a contemplative is able to be contemplative because he already has the time and the basics of life under control. For example, those people embroiled in the need to work in order to survive probably do not have the time or the energy to be contemplative. Often the contemplative hero comes from one of three categories: (1) the rich (Adlai Stevenson, John Lennon); (2) the ascetics (Ghandi, Casteneda's Don Juan); and (3) university professors (Timothy Leary, Woodrow Wilson, Lawrence Kohlberg). One would not expect to find a political leader or a union leader who had the time to contemplate any greater truth.

The fact that contemplatives either come today as scientists, philosophers, or writers points up one of the inherent problems of the contemplative hero. It is difficult to change this philosophy into socio-political life. For example, one can imagine Clint Eastwood (Dirty Harry or of Italian westerns) cleaning up a town and drifting on. It is more difficult to imagine him settling down to marshall a town. The contemplative must escape the world, he cannot easily live in it. Woodstock could not have been held on the property of General Motors, for example.

The Comic (Shakespearan) Hero

The comic hero cannot cause harm or pain to any person; but exists, rather, to remind others of a part of life purposely ignored or forgotten. For example, the Elephant Man reminds people of the possibility of their own abnormality and his shunning may be more the normal mind's revulsion of its own possible plight than an attempt to harm this person. In Shakespearan plays, the jester exists to remind the main characters, who have been defining the world in their own ways, that such self definition is necessarily and potentially deceptive. So, too, does Terry Fox remind us that we must all live and die and, although we reject the thought, we cannot escape the consequences. He also reminds us that, in the suffering and struggle, there can be a certain dignity. The extent to which such a lesson can be learned was evident, to me, when I watched the producers and writers accept awards for the TV movie Bill (starring Mickey Rooney).

The comic is comic because he does not fit the norm set by the normal or the strong. In this sense, the comic comes to suffer simply because he is different. In an ironic way, the comic figure also becomes an heroic figure. For example, while we laugh at Cervante's Don Quixote, we also admire him. We wish we still had the dream, the idealism, or the energy "to fight the unbeatable foe" or "to right the unrightable wrong". We cannot and our scorn is partly at him for being so naive and partly at ourselves for losing our idealism. The comic says "If only things were different (the norms were changed)". And, in a way, the suffering of the comic hero (i.e., Lenny Bruce or the Yippies) is personal proof that they are right.

The Rustic

The rustic is a recent brand of hero, emerging as a possible reaction to the growth of technology and science in the 1950's, 1960's, and 1970's. Instead of Mr. Whipple's showing his unconscious slavery to technology by squeezing the Charmin, a thoughtful questioning of whether Charmin is biodegradable or not has emerged. Is the increased use of wood for heat and cooking in the United States and Canada a search for a cheap fuel source or a clinging to a tradition of nature?

The rustic lives in a world made "constipated" by technology for its "relief" and he says "This is not right! We have wounded the way things should be with our lust, greed, and materialism". The struggle in the world is the struggle between the natural world and the perverse drives of mankind.

The rustic's main metaphor is one of harmony. People and nature must live together, neither one dominating the other. All things are put together naturally as they should be, and if let alone will continue to work for the benefit of all. One must use common sense, conservation, and an establishment of the goodness in the common to promote a natural peace.

Thoughts About Heroes

Coming to a definiton of hero and heroic activity is difficult. Qualitative terms like courage, ability, and noble beg a further question "courage to do what?, ability to do what?, . . . I have chosen to focus on two adjectives that seem to accompany any definiton of hero: distinguished or admired. Without making evaluative statements about the qualities of nouns like courage or ability, my definition of hero looks at the idea of distinction and admiration and I ask the main question "What kind of person is admired or distinguished?" Such a definition might seem to force the idea of hero (for example, how can a seducer/collector be heroic?); however, it cannot be argued that collectors of power, lovers, money, or sports teams are admired by a large number of people. And, since my focus has been on the kind of individual citizen held as a role model or admired, I believe this focus is justifiable. While I have certain preferences in the categories, I cannot deny that there are certain categories that are admired by a number of people.

I also make no claims as to the complete status of my categories and I have been explicit about the beginning nature of this paper.

However, the premise, I believe, is sound. North American democracy has been influenced by the idea or myth of the charismatic individual who, through his actions, makes a unique and lasting contribution to the flavour of American life. Furthermore, there is still a large number of young citizens who dream this American dream. The extent of their ability to reach such a goal may influence the future shape of North American democracy. If this dream is frustrated, can an efficacious brand of North American democracy continue to exist?

The Citizen as Hero

Archtypes	Personality Traits	Personal Values	Kind of Actions Engaged In	Individual Examples of Archtypes	View of World
The Athlete/Cowboy (Homeric)	Professional, Self-demanding, Can identify more with enemies than lower friends, Separated from family's friends (background)	High Emotion, Admiration, Profile	Events/Contests highly charged	Wayne Gretzky, Henry Kissinger, Reggie Jackson, Ike	Beyond the Moment, World of Conflict, Fighting is Normal Condition, Temporary Job
The Endowed (Tragic)	Pedigree and achievement, Knows suffering, Strength/cannot accept limitations	Self-confidence, Fame	Actions that bring status and glory, Eventually downfall is known to all	MacArthur, John Belushi, Marilyn Monroe, Richard Nixon, JFK, Freddie Prinz, The Gingerbread Man, The Sex Symbol	Personal, A stage to prove se
The Lover (Erotic)	Unhappiness, Unreality, Power/Control Mad	The score, Ownership	Counting and collecting, Violating social norms	Don Juan, Scrooge, Hugh Hefner, Howard Hughes, George Steinbrenner, The Gabors	Fairytale, People as objects
The Thinker	Serious/Not frivolous, Comfortableness, Philosophical	Contemplation, Peace-making (generally), Harmony	Hunting for hidden truth, Soul-delivering (the greater quest)	Adlai Stevenson, Clint Eastwood, Ghandi, B.F. Skinner, John Lennon, Kohlberg, Timothy Leary, Casteneda	Entangled in physic world
The Comic (Shakespearean)	Weakness or obvious flaw, Different from neighbor	Overcoming personal obstacles	Suffering and struggle	Don Quixote, Terry Fox, Lenny Bruce, Elephant Man, Mickey Rooney "Bill"	Different from othe Personal conflict
The Rustic	Common sense, Older, Simple	Nature saving, Harmony, Peace, Simple comfort	The common, ordinary, everyday conservation	Mrs. Olsen, Grandpa Walton, Golda Meir, Robert Young	Too technological, Worth saving

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